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'ENGLISH VERDURE, ENGLISH CULTURE, ENGLISH COMFORT'

Ireland and the Gothic Elsewhere in Jane Austen's *Emma*

Andrew McInnes



JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA* is a novel about secrets. It is about guilt, shame and humiliation. However, Austen's comic mode and irrepressible heroine veil the extent to which *Emma* depends upon occluded plots, forbidden desire and mortification. Indeed, for much of the novel, *Emma* renders these things invisible. Discussing 'seeing nothing' in *Emma*, Ian Duncan quotes extensively from the famous scene in which the Donwell Abbey estate is described as an ideal of Englishness. Walking across Mr Knightley's pleasure grounds, the group of Highbury residents reach a 'broad short avenue of limes':

It led to nothing; nothing but a view at the end over a low stone wall with high pillars, which seemed intended, in their erection, to give the appearance of an approach to the house, which never had been there [...] It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive.¹

Analysing this passage, Duncan describes 'seeing nothing' in the view over Donwell as a Humean 'characterological blankness [...] signify[ing] the gloss of plenty rather than the gape of lack'.² Seeing nothing, Duncan argues, articulates:

the ideological theme of a national society constituted upon a harmonious conjunction between a modern economy based on imperial trade and a traditional social hierarchy based on inherited property. 'Nothing' refers not only to the everyday domain of traffic: it also refers, obliquely and metaphorically, to that reality's governing abstraction, embedded in naturalized forms and qualities, English verdure, culture, comfort.³

In linking this scene to questions of nationhood, Duncan follows the work of critics such as Lionel Trilling, Susan Morgan and Claudia Johnson, who have all discussed the national significance of events in *Emma*, describing it as a 'patriotic novel', its representation of England as 'idyllic', and arguing for its place as 'the great English novel of the early nineteenth century'.⁴

However, Duncan goes on to link Austen's perspective on nothingness with David Hume's understanding of double consciousness, in which we imagine that objects have a continued and uninterrupted existence outside ourselves but, on reflection, realise that even our own perceptions of things are interrupted and dis-

continuous. Hume describes this philosophical system as the 'monstrous offspring' of imagination and reflection, and Duncan links Hume's ironic scepticism to the rise of fiction in the eighteenth century. What interests me here is the connection between Austen's *Emma* and Humean monstrosity: 'Seeing nothing' means *not* seeing the contradictions between modern capital and inherited property in this vision of national plenty. For Hume, what we see is already conditioned by what we imagine to be there and what we remember being there in the past, a perceptual system which he argues is paradoxical because of the mismatch between imagination and reflection. 'Fiction' develops as a modulating term to avoid these contradictions, both as a coping strategy for everyday life and, significantly, in representations of quotidian existence in the novel. Monstrosity arises, for Duncan, in the realisation that '[o]ur sentimental investment in common life and in the authority of custom is framed by the fitful, uneven knowledge of their fictiveness'.⁵ In this article, I want to shift the focus from Austen's idyllic representation of English 'common life' to the place of Ireland in *Emma*, arguing that the monstrous threat posed by England's nearest colony destabilises the 'English comfort' celebrated in the central portions of the novel by confronting readers with the uncanny knowledge of its fictiveness. By focusing on Austen's gothicised representation of Ireland in *Emma*, I argue that she fractures the fragile sense of British national identity developing in the early nineteenth century, presenting Ireland and Irishness as a threat both to British Union and revealing the power relations underpinning English culture.

Ireland remains unvisited and almost invisible in *Emma*. However, the country impacts upon the novel most significantly through Emma's salacious conjectures about the relationship between Jane Fairfax and her childhood friend's new husband, Mr Dixon, an Anglo-Irish landlord. Emma fabricates an unrequited romance between Jane and Mr Dixon (although, she also spitefully wonders whether it has been consummated), leading to Jane's heartbroken decision to flee the Campbells to stay with the Bateses in Highbury. Frank Churchill uses Emma's unkind conjectures to obfuscate his own, real romance with Jane, deploying 'Irishness' as a highly charged term in his double-dealing flirtations with Emma and his actual lover. Austen further alludes to the Irish gothic in Harriet Smith's reading of Regina Maria Roche's *The Children of the Abbey* (1796), and Irish Romanticism more generally in Frank's purchase of 'a new set of Irish melodies' for Jane, alongside his secret gift of a pianoforté. The present of Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies* (1815) draws attention to Frank's ambiguous performance of masculinity, connecting his sense of disenfranchisement to the Irish Catholic Moore and his poetic cast of heroic failures. Gothic Ireland allows Austen to play with tropes from the gothic more generally in *Emma*, finding a frail, female gothic heroine in Jane; a comic gothic villain in Frank; and a persecutory, oppositional femme fatale in her powerful protagonist. Furthermore, preoccupations with identity, inheritance and the legacy of the past in the present that characterise an Irish gothic writing question the lasting legitimacy of the English Donwell Abbey.

Irish gothic studies have had a contentious critical history over the past twenty years, expanding, challenging and bringing urgency to the field of the gothic generally. Existential questions about the status of Irish gothic as a genre, mode, register, tradition, habitus and/or niche have raged and proved inconclusive. Both Jarlath Killeen's *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction* and Christina Morin and Niall Gillespie's *Irish Gothics* (both 2014) offer illuminating ways through the thorny sidetracks of theory, with Killeen claiming both 'genre' and 'tradition' as untidy, impure and democratic ways of theorising the Irish gothic, whilst Morin and Gillespie argue for the opening up of the study of Irish gothic literature, stressing *interpretations* over interpretation.⁶ In her own chapter in *Irish Gothics*, Morin reads pamphlets and poetry alongside novels to argue for

a cosmopolitan conception of gothic literary production wherein questions of religious background, political affinity, geographical location, and literary genre become subsumed within an overarching cultural practice that fundamentally transcends the normative boundaries usually ascribed to 'Gothic' and 'Irish Gothic' literature.⁷

Morin's ideal of cosmopolitan gothic offers a sightline to my own study of Austen, neither Irish nor generally recognised as a gothic writer. I argue that Austen's realist aesthetic is both constituted and challenged by her banishment of self-consciously gothic elements to the margins of her texts: a textual boundary which is represented as distinctively Irish in *Emma*.

As Killeen argues, 'Ireland as a whole is readily identifiable as a Gothic space in popular culture'.⁸ He quotes Darryl Jones's discussion of 'Celtic Gothic' which claims that 'in the ideological rhetoric of horror, Catholics, Welshmen, hillbillies and cannibals are all pretty much the same', agreeing with Jones' analysis of 'the Celt as a kind of counter-Enlightenment figure, and of Celtic lands as zones of the weird, [developing] hand in hand with the emergence of the Gothic novel and the appearance of modern English identity'.⁹ Jones himself cites Austen's own comic gothic novel *Northanger Abbey* as a parodic example of this construction of Celtic gothic, quoting Catherine Morland's willingness to yield 'the northern and western extremities' of her own country to the gothic fringe, along with the continental locations—'Italy, Switzerland and the South of France'—indicative of the Radcliffean gothic she is in the process of forgoing.¹⁰ Jones argues that

the carefully constructed eighteenth-century 'British' identity has fractured here, and Catherine's thinking aligns the dangerous, lawless inhabitants of [...] Scotland, Wales, Ireland [...] with their murderous European counterparts, all governed by passions and set in explicit opposition to a stable, lawful, moderate Englishness.¹¹

As with Duncan's linkage of *Emma* with Humean monstrosity, I find it telling that Jones connects *Northanger Abbey* with horror. In what follows I argue that *Emma* develops *Northanger Abbey*'s brief foray into Celtic gothic territory by making Ireland the marker of suppressed desires, occluded plots, and instability in the novel. In both *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*, Austen uses the gothic to express anxieties about Britishness: Scotland, Wales, and Ireland are positioned

as dangerously other, lumped together with the threatening European locations which constitute earlier gothic geographies, to English stability. Moreover, her representation of Ireland partakes of the cosmopolitanism celebrated by Morin, albeit more cautiously, by incorporating allusions to Roche's gothic novel and Thomas Moore's collections of Celtic song alongside Emma's cruel conjectures and Frank's crueller play.

Roche's 1796 *The Children of the Abbey* is one of the gothic novels read by Harriet Smith, but not by her errant lover Robert Martin. The other is Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791). Austen uses Radcliffe to play with the relationship between fancy, reason and imagination in gothic fiction, drawing on Radcliffe's 'explained supernatural' aesthetic, in which the seemingly ghostly events in her fiction are given rational explanations, to implicitly contrast the imaginary fears of the Radcliffian heroine with the more confident, if equally misplaced, conjectures of Emma.¹² Whereas, with *The Children of the Abbey*, Austen engages with Roche's shifting representations of space and place in her novel to map a gothic geography for *Emma*, framing her celebrated depiction of Englishness with haunting, destabilising hints of Irish violence.

Regina Maria Roche was a popular gothic novelist from the south of Ireland. Her later novel, *Clermont* (1798) is one of the 'horrid novels' shared between Catherine Morland and Isabelle Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*. Both *Clermont* and *The Children of the Abbey* went through various editions throughout the nineteenth century, proving particularly popular in America, as well as being translated into French and Spanish. There has been a recent resurgence of critical interest in her works, as well as an argument about her religious sympathies, with Maria Purves situating her as unequivocally Roman Catholic and Diane Long Hoeveler, on the contrary, positioning her convincingly as an Anglo-Irish writer sharing the Irish Protestants' ambivalence towards Catholicism.¹³ *The Children of the Abbey* follows the disinherited orphans Amanda and Oscar Fitzalan from a pastoral Wales to debauched London, from gothic Ireland to Ossianic Scotland. Travelling the length and breadth of Britain, the siblings must fend off the respective lust and enmity of the villainous Colonel Belgrave, before they are seemingly supernaturally delivered into their inheritance of Dunreath Abbey, and given the happy endings of conventional marriage plots, which otherwise seemed doomed to disaster and misery. Focusing not on the highborn siblings but Amanda's hubristic nurse Ellen, Richard Cronin and Dorothy Macmillan argue that Roche's novel offers Austen's Harriet Smith 'her own reflection not in the heroine of a novel but in one of its humbler characters', in Ellen's decision to shun her former lover Chip in favour of the Reverend Howel, who, like Mr Elton in *Emma*, aims, alternatively and ultimately unsuccessfully, for a relationship with her mistress.¹⁴ Cronin and Macmillan characterise Austen's choice of Harriet's favourite novels as 'tart, witty, not perhaps very kind, but wholly characteristic'.¹⁵ Beth Kowaleski Wallace has also connected Roche's 'positive depiction of a nun' in the novel with Emma's desire to live a celibate life: 'Responding to what can be seen as an idealized life in the convent, Emma might find something to admire

in the independent life that Roche's novel seems to afford the nuns'.¹⁶ I argue that Austen uses Roche's novel beyond either caustic commentary on Harriet's presumptions or Emma's unfocused celibate imaginings to shape her engagement with gothic Ireland in the novel.

The parallels between Harriet and Ellen or Emma and the Abbess aside, there is little to connect *Emma* with *The Children of the Abbey* in terms of plot. Roche's novel meanders through the four nations making up Britain, whereas Austen remains focussed on '3 or 4 families in a country village' in England. Roche divides the action between Amanda's doom-laden courtship with Lord Mortimer, disrupted by Belgrave's attempted seductions, as well as social snobbery and complicated misunderstandings, and Oscar's equally disastrous military career in Ireland. Austen filters most of the action of her novel through Emma's snobbish, matchmaking, imaginative consciousness. Although Roche sides with the Radcliffean aesthetic of the explained supernatural, the conclusion of *The Children of the Abbey* hinges on such classic gothic apparatus as seemingly ghostly apparitions in ruined chapels, imprisoned (step)mothers, and rediscovered wills and testaments. Austen's representation of the Abbey in *Emma* is self-consciously stripped of gothic paraphernalia: Donwell is depicted as a thoroughly modern estate, tastefully avoiding fashionable improvements. Such is the contrast between the two novels that Austen's allusion to Roche's text works to highlight these differences: stability over movement; control over dispossession; management over picturesque decay.

On the other hand, several moments stand out in *The Children of the Abbey*'s sometimes unlikely plot. Early on, Oscar is manipulated by Belgrave into lying to his lover Adela Honeywood about a former attachment, displaying a miniature portrait of his sister to prove this fabricated love affair (with an unconscious gesture towards the incest taboo). The confusion over portraiture and the loved object behind it perhaps provides a hint for the muddle about Harriet's portrait in *Emma*. What interests me, however, is the gothic illiteracy of Oscar's behaviour, easily and frustratingly duped by Belgrave's machinations, who uses Adela's disappointment to inveigle his way into her affections, marrying her, and thereby causing Oscar to have a minor nervous breakdown. Oscar, unlike Harriet, or even Catherine Morland, has clearly never read a gothic novel. Another moment, offering a later reflection upon this one, sees Amanda similarly duped by Belgrave and two of her jealous relations, Lady Greystock and her daughter Euphrasia. Amanda is tricked into retiring to Euphrasia's room when she and her mother have gone to a ball. In the bedroom, Amanda is suddenly confronted by Belgrave. Euphrasia returns unexpectedly in the company of Lord Mortimer. Belgrave agrees to hide in the closet, in which he is soon discovered by the jealous Mortimer. Amanda faints, realising she has been set up, gasping, "Oh! I see," said she in the agony of her soul, "I see I am the dupe of complicated artifice."¹⁷ I can imagine Austen smiling at this line, using it as inspiration for the 'complicated artifice' of her own occluded plot in *Emma*; an artifice which dupes not only her main characters but her readers as well.

Beyond this allusion to the Irish gothic of Roche's novel, Austen constructs a gothic Ireland out of Emma's conjectures about Jane's relationship with the Anglo-Irish Dixons, and Frank's flirtatious play with 'Irishness' in his double-dealings with Jane and Emma. Jane's refusal to travel to Ireland with her guardians the Campbells to visit their daughter provides the impetus for her to visit the Bateses in Highbury, inspiring Emma to imagine some sort of illicit relationship between Jane and Mr Dixon. Miss Bates explains that:

'Mrs Dixon has persuaded her father and mother to come over and see her directly. They had not intended to go over till the summer, but she is so impatient to see them again—for till she married last October, she was never away from them so much as a week, which must make it very strange to be in different kingdoms, I was going to say, but however different countries, and so she wrote a very urgent letter to her mother [...]' (p. 195)

Miss Bates's digressive discussion of Ireland reveals more than she understands herself of Ireland's position in the cultural imaginary of Austen's novel. Miss Bates' slip between 'different kingdoms' and 'countries' refers to the recent Act of Union of 1800 between Britain and Ireland, and the strangeness she imagines Mrs Dixon to be feeling alludes lightly to Ireland's gothic accoutrements. Mrs Dixon's urgency provides Emma with the hint of unhappiness she requires in her conjectures concerning Jane's supposed affair with Mr Dixon. Miss Bates continues unconsciously to provide the gossip material from which Emma develops her theory, revealing Jane to have been the couple's chaperone and concluding: "He is the most amiable, charming young man, I believe. Jane was quite longing to go to Ireland, from his account of things". 'At this moment,' Austen adds, 'an ingenious and animating suspicion entered Emma's brain with regard to Jane Fairfax, this charming Mr Dixon, and the not going to Ireland' (p. 195). 'Not going to Ireland' is significant, not only for Emma's conjectures about Jane's decision, but also for Austen's representation of the country in the novel: Ireland remains unvisited, unheard, invisible throughout *Emma*—a receptacle for Emma's imaginative recreation of Jane's mysterious inner life, for Frank's teasing treatment of both women, and for Austen's gothic purposes.

After Emma tells Frank of her suspicions about Jane and Mr. Dixon, he uses them both to obfuscate his own illicit relationship with Jane and as a shared private joke directed against Austen's heroine. Caught staring admiringly at Jane by Emma, Frank pretends to be struck by his secret lover's new hairstyle:

'[B]ut really Miss Fairfax has done her hair in so odd a way [...] that I cannot keep my eyes from her [...] I see nobody else looking like her!—I must go and ask her whether it is an Irish fashion. Shall I?—Yes, I will [...] and see how she takes it;—whether she colours [...]'
(pp. 260–61)

Frank seems to be cruelly teasing Jane here, although he manages to stand between her and Emma, so that the latter cannot see how Jane reacts. However, his phrasing

'I cannot keep my eyes from her' and 'I see nobody else looking like her!' begins to reveal his true feelings about her.

Later, he uses Emma's Irish conjectures to disguise his own purchase of a pianoforte for Jane. Frank seems to join in the general assumption that Col. Campbell has sent the musical instrument as a gift from Ireland, whilst playing with Emma's imagined romance between Mr Dixon and Jane, at the same time as speaking secretly to Jane of their own romance. He begins by praising his own choice of piano: "the softness of the upper notes I am sure is exactly what he and *all that party* would particularly prize" (p. 181). Emma reads the emphasis on 'all that party' to refer to Mr Dixon, whereas Frank is really talking about his own meeting with Jane at Weymouth. Frank begs Jane to play a waltz like one they'd danced the previous night. Instead, she plays one that the couple had danced at Weymouth: "What felicity," Frank says, "it is to hear a tune again which *has* made one happy!—If I mistake not that was danced at Weymouth" (p. 182). Jane 'looked up at him for a moment, coloured deeply, and played something else'. Frank then praises his own purchase of 'a new set of Irish melodies' for Jane, again pretending to think it is from Col. Campbell:

'He knew Miss Fairfax could have no music here. I honour that part of the attention particularly; it shews it to have been so thoroughly from the heart. Nothing hastily done; nothing incomplete. True affection only could have prompted it.' (p. 182)

Emma reads this as another dig at Jane about Mr Dixon and is surprised by 'a smile of secret delight' 'with all the deep blush of consciousness' on Jane's face, concluding '[t]his amiable, upright, perfect Jane Fairfax was apparently cherishing very reprehensible feelings' (p. 183). Influenced by her own Irish conjectures, Emma gothicises Jane's bodily reactions to Frank's self-aggrandising chatter: blushes and smiles incriminate the secret lover.

Frank's gift to Jane of Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*, published at intervals between 1808 and 1834, is used by Austen both to comment on Emma's gothic conjectures about Jane and to underscore the romance between her and Frank. One of the *Irish Melodies* from the fourth series of 1811, 'Lesbia Hath a Beaming Eye', seems particularly apposite in relation to Emma and Jane. Lesbia's titular 'beaming eye', her 'robes of gold' and 'wit refined' are compared to her disparagement with the speaker's lover, Nora Creina's 'gentle, bashful' looks, her simple, natural attire, and mild artlessness.¹⁸ In the third stanza on Lesbia's wit, the speaker's question, 'But, when its ['wit refined'] points are gleaming around us, | Who can tell if they're designed | To dazzle merely or to wound us?', works as well for Emma's cruel conjectures about Jane's romantic history as criticisms of Lesbia herself. Contrasting Austen's Emma and Jane with Moore's Lesbia and Nora deepens Austen's play with the gothic elsewhere in *Emma*, cementing Emma and Jane's status as eerie doubles of one another.

Thomas Moore's position as pseudonymous satirist, celebrity songster and disenfranchised hero, as Julia M. Wright characterises him, also reflects upon Frank's own status in the novel. Wright argues that Moore adopts various 'styles of

masculinity' over the course of his career, from purveyor of popular, depoliticised national song through a more radical role as satirist to a precursor of the national martyr figure in the Young Ireland movement.¹⁹ She concludes that '[m]asculinity emerges in Moore's overall corpus [...] as a complex negotiation with different audiences in which "attention" can offer an alternative, though not an equivalent, to participation in the nation-state'.²⁰ Like Moore, then, Frank also performs his masculinity through garnering attention to himself—from Jane, Emma and the other residents of Highbury—because his dependent position otherwise threatens to emasculate him. Austen draws on Thomas Moore as a representative figure of Irish Romanticism in her representation of Frank in order to position him, like Ireland and its gothic accoutrements, as abject.

Finally, in this scene, Jane herself plays with Emma's conjectures about Ireland by playing Frank's favourite Irish/Scottish air, 'Robin Adair', about the relationship between Lady Caroline Keppel and the eponymous Irish surgeon in the 1750s. Austen's use of 'Robin Adair' develops her allusion to *Irish Melodies* earlier in the scene. Both this individual song and Moore's collection partake of the Celtic gothic which, in the English imagination, tends to position Irish, Scottish and Welsh literature as equivalent, and similarly threatening to English hegemony. Like *Irish Melodies*, 'Robin Adair' is also particularly resonant in relation to Frank and Jane's secret romance. Peter F. Alexander argues that Jane's choice of song offers a musical clue to her relationship with Frank, although Emma misreads Frank's admission that 'Robin Adair' is 'his favourite' as referring to Mr Dixon and not himself, in the third person (p. 284). Alexander also reads Robin Adair's refrain—'But now thou'rt cold to me, | Robin Adair'—as 'allusively but aptly foreshadow[ing] much of the suffering, the privation, and the secrecy [Jane] has to endure' for much of the rest of the novel.²¹ Suffering, privation, secrecy: even when sharing a private joke with Frank, Jane Fairfax is shadowed by the gothic.

Austen uses Robin Adair to allude to Jane's misery, so that the Irish/Scottish song joins Darryl Jones's 'ideological rhetoric of horror [in which] Catholics, Welshmen, hillbillies and cannibals are all pretty much the same'. Drawing on Jones's argument, I want to read Harriet Smith's encounter with the band of gypsies as an incursion of, if not the Irish, then at least a loosely Celticised gothic into the text. Deborah Epstein Nord explains the gypsies' paradoxical position within the early nineteenth-century cultural imagination via ideas of internal otherness: 'Unlike colonial subjects [...] Gypsies were a domestic or an internal other, and their proximity and visibility were crucial features in their deployment as literary or symbolic figures'.²² In the context of the novel as a whole, the gypsies make visible the almost invisible threads connecting Austen's English fiction with the Irish Gothic. Austen treats this miniature gothic eruption in the text of *Emma* with characteristic comic deftness. Harriet, suffering from 'cramp after dancing', and abandoned by her more athletic friend, Miss Bickerton, is quickly surrounded by a 'party of gypsies', comprising 'half a dozen children, headed by a stout woman and a great boy' (p. 375). Austen implicitly criticises Harriet and her friend's cowardly response to this group of vagrant children: 'How the trampers might have

behaved, had the young ladies been more courageous, must be doubtful; but such an invitation for attack could not be resisted'. She suggests that Harriet could have managed the children herself, if she had taken a more active stance towards them. Throughout the scene, Austen diminishes the threat posed by the gypsies. Surrounding Harriet, they are 'all clamorous, and impertinent in look, though not absolutely in word' (pp. 376–77). Harriet, 'trembling and conditioning' with the beggars, is saved by the arrival of Frank Churchill: 'The terror which the woman and boy had been creating in Harriet was then their own portion.' (p. 377) Frank brings the fainting Harriet to Hartfield and leaves her in Emma's care.

The incident is treated as trivial by Austen's narrator and most of the residents of Highbury, after the gypsies retreat instead of staying to face Mr Knightley's justice. However, Emma and her nephews are much taken by the adventure, prompting the famous moment of free indirect discourse which describes Emma as 'an imaginiſt':

Such an adventure as this,—a fine young man and a lovely young woman thrown together in such a way, could hardly fail of suggesting certain ideas to the coldest heart and the steadiest brain. So Emma thought, at least. Could a linguist, could a grammarian, could even a mathematician have seen what she did, have witnessed their appearance together, and heard their history of it, without feeling that circumstances had been at work to make them peculiarly interesting to each other?—How much more must an imaginiſt, like herself, be on fire with speculation and foresight!—especially with such a ground-work of anticipation as her mind had already made. (pp. 377–78)

Austen's narration both gives voice to Emma's romantic conjectures here and ironises them: 'So Emma thought, at least' gives us access to Emma's thoughts—her warm heart and unsteady brain—at the same time as indicating that she is more than half-creating the relationship between Harriet and Frank. The focus on language—'could a linguist, could a grammarian'—inscribes the term 'imaginiſt' with a literary quality, which critics such as Michael Williams, Claudia Johnson and Peter Knox-Shaw have argued positions Emma as a writerly figure, directing the living characters in Highbury like a (flawed) novelist. Johnson connects *Emma* to Austen's earlier comic gothic novel *Northanger Abbey* through their joint interest in women's writing and novel reading, arguing that '*Emma*, like *Northanger Abbey* before it, is a cagey celebration of ["female writing and reading"]'.²³ In her entertaining repudiation of the '[t]ransparently misogynist, sometimes even homophobic' bias of earlier criticism of *Emma*, which tends to hold Austen's heroine in moral or psychosexual opprobrium, Johnson links reading and writing to Emma's status as an imaginiſt: 'not only are Emma's attempts to "author" people according to her intentions held at faults, but so are her related efforts to "read" them: Emma is rebuked alternatively as a dominatrix or as an "imaginiſt" or "female Quixote"'.²⁴ I want to push these ideas further to envision Emma, the imaginiſt dominatrix, as an implicitly gothic figure—'on fire with speculation

and foresight'—drawing on similar characteristics as the imaginative heroines of gothic fiction, in comic vein.

Let's return to where I began, to Mr Knightley's Donwell estate, but now with the spectre of gothic Ireland in mind. The past of Donwell Abbey as a Catholic monastery, divested of its status and wealth by Henry VIII and passed on to the loyal Knightleys, is invisible and unheard in *Emma*. Both Roger E. Moore and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace contrast Austen's idealised representation of Knightley's Donwell estate with General Tilney's more sinister Northanger Abbey. Moore argues that:


Austen stresses her approbation [of Donwell Abbey and its owner] in her choice of allegorical, almost Bunyanesque, names. Mr. Knightley seems a true knight who recognizes and fulfils his responsibilities, a man worthy of safeguarding an abbey's legacy, while Donwell Abbey is a place where the social and economic functions of the old monastery continue to be 'done well'.²⁵

Knightley's knightly nature could be read as yet another trace of the gothic in *Emma*. Moore sounds a note of caution at the end of his analysis of Donwell Abbey, situating it as 'an exceptional place' and arguing that 'Austen's repeated praise of the house and the lands [...] almost make them seem unreal or too good to be true'. My reading of Donwell Abbey in relation to the Irish gothic alluded to elsewhere in the novel furthers Moore's sense of the estate's idealised exceptionality. Kowaleski-Wallace reads Emma's review of Knightley's estate late in the novel as analogous to the moment in which Elizabeth Bennet sees Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice*. Noting that Emma's vision of Donwell Abbey strives to erase any trace of its history as a monastery, Kowaleski-Wallace argues that the estate represents:

a pacific scene that naturalizes the idea that Donwell Abbey is not just an estate but an ideal, modern social microcosm. Because Donwell Abbey is not given a fictional history of a 'rich endowment', it does not appear to be haunted by former inhabitants. Its dazzling landscape appears to have been drawn purposefully to banish any hints of darker days.²⁶

It is my contention that Austen's allusions to the Irish gothic elsewhere in the novel reintroduce hints of darker days throughout the text, questioning not only the legitimacy but the reality of an estate like Donwell Abbey.

The question of inheritance—of central importance to the orphans of Dunreath Abbey in Roche's novel—is only briefly raised in Austen's: concerned about Knightley's imagined romance with Jane, and later Harriet, Emma is scandalised that her nephew Henry faces losing Donwell to Fairfax—or, worse, Smith—interlopers. Austen's narrator offers this acerbic comment on the speed with which Emma forgets these worries upon her own engagement with Knightley: 'It is remarkable, that Emma, in the many, very many, points of view in which she was beginning to consider Donwell Abbey, was never struck with any sense of injury to her nephew Henry, whose rights as heir apparent had been so tenaciously regarded' (p. 498). Henry's inheritance is pushed from Emma's consciousness, as

Donwell's past is banished from the novel. In *Emma*, Austen ruthlessly silences the past, ripping it out of England and transplanting it to a gothic Ireland, which then returns to haunt the margins of the text, threatening a newly established British identity with its own dissolution. 

NOTES

1. Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. by Bharat Tandon (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2012), p. 408. All further references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the body of the essay.
2. Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 116.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
4. For *Emma* as a 'patriotic novel', see Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 125. Lionel Trilling describes it as 'idyllic' in 'Emma', *Encounter*, 8.6 (June 1957), 59. For *Emma*'s status as 'the great English novel of the early nineteenth century', see Susan Morgan, *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 50. For a useful overview of treatments of *Emma* as a national novel, see Michael Kramp, 'The Woman, the Gypsies, and England: Harriet Smith's National Role', *College Literature*, 31.1 (Winter 2004), 147–68 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2004.0008>>.
5. Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, p. 123.
6. For Jarlath Killeen's convincing defence of both 'genre' and 'tradition' in relation to Irish Gothic, see *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2014), pp. 12–27. For Christina Morin and Niall Gillespie's pluralist approach to Irish gothic, see their *Irish Gothics: Genres, Forms, Modes, and Traditions 1760–1890* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 6.
7. Christina Morin, 'Theorizing "Gothic" in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', in Morin and Gillespie, *Irish Gothics*, p. 16.
8. Killeen, *Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction*, p. 9.
9. *Ibid.*
10. See Darryl Jones, *Horror: A Thematic History in Fiction and Film* (London: Arnold, 2002), pp. 18–20, for his discussion of Austen and 'Celtic Gothic'.
11. Jones, *Horror: A Thematic History*, p. 19.
12. See my 'Labyrinths of Conjecture: The Gothic Elsewhere in Jane Austen's *Emma*', *Gothic Studies*, 18.1 (May 2016), 71–84, for a more detailed account of Austen's indebtedness to Radcliffe for the comic gothic effects of *Emma*.
13. See Diane Long Hoeveler, 'Regina Maria Roche's *The Children of the Abbey*: Contesting the Catholic Presence in Female Gothic Fiction', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 31.1/2 (2012), 137–58, for her account of the debates about Roche's religious sympathies and her convincing positioning of her as riven by ambivalence.
14. Cronin, Richard and Dorothy McMillan. 'Harriet Smith's Reading', *Notes & Queries*, 49.247 (2002), 450.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Beth Kowaleski Wallace, "'Penance and Mortification For Ever': Jane Austen and the Ambient Noise of Catholicism", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 31.1/2 (Spring/Fall 2012), 172.
17. Regina Maria Roche, *The Children of the Abbey* (1796; London: Virtue, 1825), p. 293.

18. Thomas Moore, ‘Lesbia Hath a Beaming Eye’ in *The Collected Works of Thomas Moore, Collected by Himself*, 10 vols (London: Longman, 1841), III, 209–10.
19. Julia M. Wright, ‘Thomas Moore and the Problem of Colonial Masculinity in Irish Romanticism’ in *United Islands?: The Languages of Resistance*, ed. by John Kirk, *et al.* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), pp. 153–65.
20. Wright, ‘Thomas Moore’, p. 165.
21. Peter F. Alexander, ‘“Robin Adair” as a Musical Clue in Jane Austen’s *Emma*’, *Review of English Studies*, 39/153 (1988), 86 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/res/xxxix.153.84>>.
22. Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807–1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 3.
23. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, p. 133.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
25. Roger E. Moore, ‘The Hidden History of Northanger Abbey: Jane Austen and the Dissolution of the Monasteries’, *Religion & Literature*, 43.1 (2011), 74.
26. Kowaleski Wallace, ‘Penance and Mortification for Ever’, p. 174.

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